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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7027  
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2006

- In Today's Papers
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- TGS Rejects Investigation of General Buyukanit
- All Papers: On Monday, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) issued a statement rejecting permission for an investigation of Land Forces Commander General Yasar Buyukanit for his comments regarding the a non-commissioned jandarma officer implicated in the Semdinli bombing and his activities as a commander in southeast Turkey in the 1990s. The statement alleged that the accusations made by the Van prosecutor against Buyukanit were 'politically motivated' and designed to weaken the military in the struggle against terrorism. The TGS statement argued that the prosecutor, Ferhat Sarikaya, had 'abused his authority,' and highlighted that the indictment drafted by Sarikaya was based on an anonymous letter. The TGS also expressed concern about the fact that some lawmakers from the ruling AKP had openly backed the prosecutor. The TGS has filed a legal complaint against Sarikaya, and called on the Ministry of Justice to file charges against him. Most commentators in Turkish dailies express concern that the tough TGS statement went too far in calling for charges against the prosecutor, and some feared the statement might cast a shadow over the Semdinli investigation and illegal activities by military personnel in the southeast.
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- Gul Has Ear Surgery, Cancels US Trip
- All Papers: Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul had ear surgery yesterday due to an upper respiratory tract infection, forcing a cancellation of his scheduled visit to the United States to participate in the annual conference of the American-Turkish Council (ATC) March 25. Doctors recommended that Gul avoid all air travel for at least a month. The only cabinet minister to represent Turkey at the ATC will be State Minister Kursad Tuzmen. AKP lawmaker Egemen Bagis, Turkish Union of Chambers (TOBB) chairman

Rifat Hisarciklioglu, head of the Privatization Administration Metin Kilci, TGS Planning Department head General Hilmi Akin Zorlu, and senior MFA officials will also participate in the ATC. The highest-level official to represent the US at the conference will be Deputy Secretary of Commerce David Samson. MFA officials told the press that one or two Turkish cabinet ministers generally attend the ATC meetings each year, and confirmed that this practice would continue this year as well.

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- Gonul Leaves for US  
- Star: Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul left for the United States Tuesday to visit Boeing facilities in Seattle, where warplanes for the 'Peace Eagle' project are produced, and to address the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles on 'the changing security environment in Eurasia and Turkey's strategic importance.' On March 26, Gonul will move on to Chile to attend the 14th International Aviation and Space Fair as the guest of Defense Minister Vivianne Blanlot Soza, before returning home March 30.

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- Sakka Appears Before Judge in Istanbul  
- Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Zaman, Yeni Safak: Syrian-born al-Qaida terror suspect Louai Sakka appeared before a court in Istanbul on Monday to face charges of involvement in suicide bombings against targets in Istanbul that killed 63 in November 2003. Sakka introduced himself as Ekrem Uzel, 'a Turkish national fighting against US troops in Iraq.' Sakka was removed from the courtroom when he refused to stand up before the presiding judge. Sakka's lawyer, Osman Karahan, was also removed from the courtroom because of a pending indictment against him for aiding the al-Qaida organization. Before

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being ushered from the courtroom, Karahan called for a 'scientific test' to determine whether the defendant is actually the same person who was arrested last year under the name Louai Sakka.

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- Arinc Defends March 1 Parliamentary Rejection of US Troops to Iraq  
- Zaman: Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc defended on Monday the Turkish Parliament's March 1, 2003 rejection of the proposal to transfer US troops to Iraq through Turkey. 'We conveyed our recommendations to the Americans before and after March 1, but they were not taken seriously. Recent reports say that 100,000 civilians have been killed in Iraq so far. This shows that the country has turned into a kind of hell. The situation today demonstrates that our concerns before March 1 were right,' Arinc said, adding that he hoped Iraq would become a democratic country.

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- Turkish columnists continue to comment on Iraq on the third anniversary of the US-led occupation. Ismail Kapan of the conservative-nationalist Turkiye warns that when the occupying forces finally withdraw, the problems they leave behind them will affect Turkey: "In order to insulate itself from these problems, Turkey needs to establish its own political and economic stability as soon as possible. But unfortunately, Turkey has not learned any lessons from the occupation. The most clear evidence of this is that the Turkish people have been diverted from the real issues by artificial agendas. When we look at the things that Turkey is forced to deal with, we can see that the country has been sidetracked from pursuing its goals."

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- In his column in the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak, Ibrahim Karagul claims that more occupations by the US will follow after Iraq. "It is a shame that in this chaotic atmosphere, we have been unable to see the real aims of this war. We can not see that Damascus, Isfahan or Cairo could face the same consequences tomorrow. Even though we ignore these facts and have accepted defeat, the generation that comes after us will understand everything. No doubt they will see the facts of today and bring us hope for tomorrow."

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- Bahadir Selim Dilek wrote in the leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet that despite President Bush's positive evaluation of the situation in Iraq, the picture deteriorated on the third anniversary of the occupation: "None of the military, economic, political or social calculations made by Washington about Iraq have been proven right. The US has been unable to break the insurgency. It has failed to supply the basic needs of the Iraqi people, strained its relations with the Shiites, failed to properly balance Kurdish demands and pulled the country toward the breaking point."

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- Bush Extends Nevruz Greetings

- Aksam: President Bush sent a message to Turkey, the Central Asian Turkish republics, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to mark the celebration of Nevruz. Bush said the US is 'blessed by the traditions and contributions of Americans of many different backgrounds.' 'Our diversity has made us stronger and better, and Laura and I send warm regards to all Americans celebrating Nevruz,' President Bush said.

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- Turkish-Armenian Ambassadors Debate Genocide on Italian TV

- Milliyet: Turkey's Ambassador in Rome, Ugur Ziyal, debated the Armenian 'massacre' question with Armenian Ambassador Rouben Sugaryan on Italian state television.

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Sugaryan did not respond to Ziyal's question whether Yerevan recognized Turkey's borders, but repeatedly stressed that Armenia wants good ties with Turkey, and that the Armenians are ready to cooperate with Turkey to open the border. Sugaryan also rejected Ziyal's proposal that a joint commission of historians from both countries be established.

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- Pentagon Advisor Warns against Threats on Secularism in Turkey

- Cumhuriyet reports that Alex Alexiev, a 'Pentagon advisor' and vice-president of Center for Security Policy, has warned that secularism in Turkey is under serious threat from the ruling AK Party. In a statement to the Bulgarian press, Alexiev claimed that secular Turkish education, the judiciary, and the military are under assault by the 'Erdogan regime.' 'If Turkey is defeated by Islamism, US national security will face a serious problem,' Alexiev said.

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- Kretschmer Urges Continued Reforms, Civilian Control of Military in Turkey

- Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak: EU Commission Representative to Turkey Hansjorg Kretschmer told a seminar in Adana on Monday that Turkish public support for EU membership had slipped to 55 percent in recent months from around 70 percent in December 2004. Kretschmer stressed that the decline was worrying, adding that Turks did not have sufficient information about the EU. 'Turkey has made great progress in the political and economic areas,' Kretschmer said, 'but it must continue reforms on freedoms, women's rights, and the judiciary.' Kretschmer also warned that more needed to be done to increase civilian control over the military, and that the budget of the Turkish armed forces should be transparent.

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- TV Highlights

- NTV (8 a.m)

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- Domestic News

- - Nevruz celebrations in Adana, Istanbul and Sanliurfa are peaceful. The largest celebration is expected to take place today in Diyarbakir. Some chant pro-Ocalan slogans during the festivities.

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- International News

- - Former Iraqi interim PM Allawi told NBC that several

neighborhoods in Baghdad are controlled by militias, and that 'ethnic cleansing' is being carried out across Iraq.

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- - Senior diplomats from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany meet in New York in an effort to break the deadlock on Iran's nuclear program.

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- - Financial crisis deepens in Palestine. Armed men raided public buildings, including the Finance Ministry and the Foreign Ministry, demanding payment of wages. Meanwhile, HAMAS has submitted its cabinet list to President Abbas.

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- - French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin vows not to back down on the controversial new employment bill as union leaders threaten to call a general strike.

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- Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at

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